



Eva Dickerson

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Interviewed by Ashby Combahee and Dartricia Rollins

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Dartricia Rollins 00:14

Alright. My name is Dartricia Rollins, and I'm here with Ashby Combahee. And we're interviewing Eva Dickerson, for the We Tell Our Own Stories: Reproductive Justice Oral Histories event. Today is November 15, 2024. Georgia Dusk: a southern liberation oral history project is conducting this oral history at Loudermilk Conference Center in downtown Atlanta as part of JusticeNOW2024 a cross-movement, power-building, and power-shifting national conference. You have been asked to participate in this oral history as part of the documentation of the long history of resistance, struggle, and organizing in Georgia and across the US South. SPARK RJ is one of the central organizations within this legacy of community networks, organizing strategies, and resources for healing in response to constant state repression. The oral history interviews provide elements of history that are often not apparent in traditional archival documents or dominant media. The interviews enable participants to reclaim the narrative and historical representation of reproductive justice organizing and movement building. Eva, can you please introduce yourself by saying your name, pronouns, age and organizing or cultural work you do?

Eva Dickerson 01:27

Okay, hey, y'all. My name is Eva. I use they/them, pronouns. I'm 27 and I guess I can start with cultural work. Um, I used to be a huge event producer in Atlanta. Um, I actually produced a picnic for Ashby and Yemi, which was really sweet. A few years back, I had like, a picnic production company that we also used to like, build sets and stage design. And now I DJ, which is really fun. I'm happy to be one of the million DJs in Atlanta *laughter* and around the world, and in terms of organizing, I'm like, the landscape has shifted so much so I can't really say, like, neatly what I do. I just want the Empire to collapse.

Dartricia Rollins 02:12

Yep. All right. And so to ground our conversation, who would you like to dedicate your oral history to?

Eva Dickerson 02:19

I think when I think when I think about reproductive justice, I think about my mom, like, and I it's like, it's very cliché to dedicate things to your mom, but I always think that, like, if my mom was raised in a world where reproductive justice existed and there were viable options for her, would she have still chosen to be a mom? And to me, that's an open ended question, and it's really special. Because I'm just like, would our moms still choose if they had every option open to them? And I don't think many of our moms would say yes, and I don't think that's a sad thing. Dedicate my mom, mine to my mom.

Dartricia Rollins 02:58

Thank you. Okay, so tell us where you're from and where do you currently live?

Eva Dickerson 03:05

Yeah, so I don't really claim where I'm from publicly. I'm from a suburb in the Northeast, and, like, I don't attribute a lot of the parts of myself I'm proud of to that suburb, especially after being politicized and politically educated around like, what the productions, the production of the suburbs, meant for Indigenous people, Black people, non-white, and otherwise marginalized people who were like, once again, being either forced into city centers And like separated from white capital or making their way into the construction of the suburb at the peril of their families and their homes. And my suburb is just like every other suburb across the United States. But I do always tell people that like Atlanta may not be where I was born, but it's definitely where I grew up, like it's the city that raised me, and I attribute so much of what I love about myself to Atlanta, and I try and spend all of my days paying Atlanta back for what it's given me.

Dartricia Rollins 04:10

What brought you to Atlanta?

Eva Dickerson 04:12

Spelman... Yeah, I didn't want to go to college. I wanted to join the Peace Corps, but when I was a senior in high school, you had to have a bachelor's degree. It's since changed, but at that time, I didn't want to apply to anywhere else, or, no excuse me, I didn't want to go to college. And when I was doing the applications for other places, I wasn't excited. I didn't see like, the possibility of a higher education, until my friend Ian, who I met because we were part of high school Democrats of America, the National Executive Committee, and we hated that shit. *laughter* Like, we didn't have language for why we hated it, but we hated it. Ian, like I was calling Ian crying because I'm like, I don't know what I'm gonna do next year. Like, I don't think any of these schools are ready for me. Ian's like, did you look at Spelman? And I was like, what Spelman, Ian's like, what Spelman sent me the website. And I saw a smile, like Black girls. And I was like, ooh, I have to go here. And I got in, yeah.

Dartricia Rollins 05:12

And so after you moved here to Atlanta, and you're at Spelman, and you talk about, you know, Atlanta being a place that raised you, I don't know, tell me a little bit more about your time here.

05:25

Yeah, my dad is a lot of things, and there's a lot of complicated elements of our relationship, but he always imbued a sense of racial pride in me and a love for Black people, and even when I was growing up in the suburb that I'm from, like, I knew that I loved Black people, that I wanted to be in solidarity with Black people and in community with Black people. And so when I came to Atlanta and I was surrounded by Black people, like, my first impression was like, this is lit, like, I love this. And then I got a little bit more intimate with the city, and I understood the ruse of Atlanta, which is like we are all Black here, but we are not all together here. And it was first exemplified to me by the fact that Spelman is surrounded by an iron gate, and inside the gate, the grass is quite literally green, so green that you're not supposed to be walking on it, and things are resourced to an extent, and people are happy to an extent. And outside of the gate is Ashview Heights and Vine City and the West End, these historic, vibrant, complex neighborhoods where people are very obviously under resourced, slash de-resourced people are doing their best to be happy despite their conditions, and there's a very, very harmful and hateful stratification. And so it's just like I'm sitting here with my racial pride and my love in Atlanta, and I walk around the AUC and people don't really say hi to each other, but when I leave Spelman and I walk around in the West End, "hey, beloved," "what's up, beautiful," "how you doing?" From the Nation of Islam man on the corner to the like patchouli incense, person outside of Tassili's, like everybody's saying hello to each other. Everybody is kindred. And, yeah, I feel like Spelman sold me, kind of like the lie that Atlanta wants to be, but the West End and Vine City showed me what Atlanta actually is, and I was enamored from the start. And it actually started because I'm disabled. I'm not visibly disabled. So I had my bike on campus, and no one else would ride their bikes. No one else had a bike. I was like, known as bike, girl. I got bored of riding my bike in the same circle. So I just like, ride my bike off campus at all times a day, my friends would be like, it's midnight, get back to the dorm. I'm like, Dude, I'm in the West End. People are outside, *laughter* and I just ran out. And people would be like, "you like that bike, baby," "you having fun, baby?" Yeah, it was, soooo...it felt like my family even more than Spelman did.

Eva Dickerson 08:06

I love the West End. Well, I love what it was.

Dartricia Rollins 08:08

Yeah. *collective, knowing yeah*

Ashby Combahee 08:11

Can you..you've given your age, but can you give year context?

Eva Dickerson 08:15

Yes. So I got to Spelman fall 2015, the same fall they interrupted Hillary Clinton during her failed run for the presidency of this colonial, destructive Empire. And I really started to like venture outside of the gates spring 2016 around the same time I was being radicalized by my peers on campus and my professors, but really my peers...

Dartricia Rollins 08:42

And what were you being radicalized around?

08:45

I think my professors were giving me the literature. Like, I remember the very first time I read Discourses (sic) on Colonialism, and I felt like I'd never read anything like that in my entire life, like a white person read Native Son with me, right? Like, that's a radical text, yeah, but like, I wasn't, it wasn't the it wasn't giving me everything but reading Discourses (sic) on Colonialism at Spelman College my first year was like getting a hug from your grandma, like someone seeing you and knowing you and understanding like, like, the rage and the snark and the like, told you so in between each of those lines, like, Cesaire is so like, I'm so over y'all in that text.

Dartricia Rollins 09:31

He's so funny.

Eva Dickerson 09:32

He's so over, yes, and it was just like, oh my god, me too.

09:36

I'm so over it too, Cesaire so like, I'm reading that my peers are disrupting Hillary Clinton and disrupting West Side Future Fund meetings and like, maybe they're not using the language of like destruction of empire and colonialism, but they have the lived actual rage, and Cesaire has the poetry, and all of those together were really monumental for me. I think another text that was really important for me was the Audre Lorde, Cancer Journals. Because, like, my professors are very much so talking about colonialism, and Audre Lorde is comparing, like, the invasion of their body to the invasion of Grenada. And so it was like, like, a Black feminist poetic on invasion and like, steel and guns and all of these things and all of it, really, just like, opened the world up for me. But then, like, just, like actual experiences, like watching the West End gentrify in real time, radicalizing. I remember once I posted on Facebook, I'm like, gentrification is like neo-colonialism. Musa wasn't going by the name Musa at this time, but they commented and they're like, "Words have meanings." "Gentrification is not neo-colonialism." I was like, Okay, thank you. *laughter* Radicalizing. Radicalizing. *laughter*

Dartricia Rollins 11:02

Musa, radicalized a lot of us.

Eva Dickerson 11:03

Hello, Thanks, Musa Thank you.

Dartricia Rollins 11:07

Yeah, yeah. So tell me more about, um, some of the work that you've been engaged in, and then more explicitly, um, I guess, like, your your experiences with reproductive justice.

11:24

yeah, um, I'll start with, I'll go in the order you described. I think, like I've said, like watching the West End be so violently transformed, like watching such a prolific, historic like Toni Cade (Bambara) was in the West End. I feel like Du Bois was probably like, maybe it wasn't called the West End, but Du Bois was definitely all over Atlanta. Like MLK was all like his family home was in Vice City, I think like these. This is a historic Black space that I'm watching Black people with class and wealth destroy, like, I know that white people are there, but I also can perceive that Kasim Reed has a hand in this, that Keisha (Lance) Bottoms has a hand in the reason that these Black neighborhoods are just being disappeared on the west side and the east side. And so it really did start with gentrification, and I think it just expanded from there. It's just like, Okay, well, like, Why can't Black people afford to own their homes? Because we're incarcerated at such a high level, okay? Well, like, that's bringing me into abolition, which was, like, people have their feelings around abolition, but for myself, as like a 19 to 22 year old, it had a lot of meaning for me. Um, so like, now we're doing housing stuff and decarceration and close the jail campaigns. A lot of my college organizing was campaigns, campaigns, campaigns, which I think is appropriate for college organizers, but as an adult now I'm like...urgh, campaigns. *laughter* A lot of my organizing was bifurcated by on campus and off campus. So off campus was a lot of work with, like Housing Justice League. There was like, a huge coalition to close ACDC, and then on campus, a lot of my work was centered on, like, rape culture, because there's a really huge gendered violence dynamic within the AUC and like, people were being like sexually terrorized across all the institutions on those campuses. And it was just like another thing that they swept under the rug to sell that lie. So a ton of work around sexual violence on the AUC, which is where I met Yemi, through being like in the Women's Center and organizing campaign meetings and things like that. And it was really because of Yemi's vision and leadership that I understood the relation between, like, ending rape culture and reproductive freedom and reproductive liberation.

Eva Dickerson 13:51

And like, quite transparently, I knew the utility and urgency of reproductive justice work, but I saw it couched so much within the domain of electoralism and electoral fetishism that I was, like, really turned off by it, but Yemi was steadfast. And was like, just doing really cool stuff, like organizing for cool people to come on campus. She, like, later in my college career, got a job at an abortion clinic, and was like, literally helping people get abortions. And so, like, I still didn't want to touch reproductive justice, but through osmosis of being deep relationship with Yemi, I was, like, learning all of this really critical stuff. And like, never, like, because of Yemi, I would never fix my mouth to talk to on a reproductive justice organizing, even when the white women went to the capital and Handmaids outfits. *laughter* And, like, because of Yemi, I always knew, like, what the law was, and like, the situation with the laws and what I would need to do. And I, like, remember the first time Yemi was on NPR to talk about her reproductive justice organizing. And, like, a few years after we graduated, Yemi started doula training. She wanted to offer this to our community. So, like it was never anything of my own volition, but really, just like, it was something Yemi cared about, so I really cared about. I got to reproductive justice organizing within, like, my career now, because I needed a job.

Dartricia Rollins 15:18

Yeah, yeah.

Ashby Combahee 15:20

That's real.

Dartricia Rollins 15:23

So then tell us why you're at this conference. Why are you at the Spark RJ conference?

15:30

Because I needed no kidding. *laughter* Um, actually, I think I don't know. I don't know if Spark's gonna want to post this, but I think the like for my truth about it is that we're at a moment where, like these nonprofits have really shown us like they're not doing everything that they say that they do, especially as we watch so many of these nonprofits fumble on the question of Palestine, which, like is one of many litmus tests, and is not that hard, especially right now when everything's everything has always been like in our faces, but right now, every single element of that genocide is in our faces. And so not only did we watch these nonprofits fumble around the question of Palestine, we also watched them fumble a historic election. Um, drastically and so there's this huge question of, like, you are sucking up all of our resources and taking up some of our brightest strategic organizing minds, what utility do you present to our communities? And I think for me, I'm like, in a position where I'm like, I want to be in direct conflict with Empire. I want every element of my day to be in direct conflict of empire. But I have to eat, I have to pay my car note, I have to survive. And I really want to like, like, in real time in my working life, be like, What are these nonprofits doing? Like, what is Spark doing? What Are any of these nonprofits doing that get us closer to decolonization. Because I, like, there's no reproductive liberation under empire, like, there's no reproductive liberation on the colonies, and there's no reproductive liberation in the imperial core, so it's just like, if we're not moving closer to decolonization, we are just like, making way for people to give birth to more slaves, and so like, why am I here? Because I have to be here because Empire says I have to have a job, and then RJ nonprofit is like, one of the few places that would hire me. But I think there's meaning that I'm able to pull from these spaces, and that, like the nonprofit managerial class is firmly established. It pays basically everyone I know and care about. What do we do about it?

Dartricia Rollins 15:42

Yeah

Ashby Combahee 15:48

That's a significant question to ask ourselves right now.

Eva Dickerson 17:23

Hello, cause, like, what are these EDS doing? Like, no tea, no shade. Everybody's got like, stuff in your closet. But I'm like, Damn y'all really fumbled that election.

Dartricia Rollins 17:59

Yeah

Eva Dickerson 18:00

You endorsed that lady and she lost?

Dartricia Rollins 18:01

Yeah, yeah. I mean to kind of to continue with this, and I'm gonna do like a reframe of, like my original question, what is required?

Eva Dickerson 18:19

Oh, what a powerful inciting question. In other words, what is to be done? Word to the big homie!

Dartricia Rollins 18:25

You know... Word to my guy Lenin.

Eva Dickerson 18:28

Word to him!

18:31

I don't know, and that part is really hard being able to sit with like I would give anything for the world to be different, and not even for me, but because there's so many little people we care about coming behind us, I would give anything for this world to be different. And I still don't know. And I think telling the truth about like, Yo nigga, I don't know. I know we need to be doing something different than like, tiktoks and fundraising. I know that we tried that variable a 1000 times, but yeah, I don't know what is to be done, what is required. I'm willing to figure it out with the people who are also willing to.

Dartricia Rollins 19:08

Yeah, I mean, I think you're asking important questions. I think you know even your your your comments around the nonprofit industrial complex and like, how has, how it has captured so many people because they need jobs.

Eva Dickerson 19:23

We need to eat...

Dartricia Rollins 19:24

Like, we quite literally, do have to work. And these are the jobs that are presented to us. But then they're also saying that they're doing liberation work. And...

19:37

Like, really, what's happening is you're stabilizing.

Dartricia Rollins 19:39

Yeah.

19:40

And you won't call it that, because it's shameful to stabilize Empire, but we're all desiring of that, like, I know the stakes of war, it's ugly, and also, if we continue to stabilize empire, we won't save it. We will, just like, dishonor ourselves along the way of its crumbling.

Dartricia Rollins 20:01

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I think what you're pointing to is, like, the very live contradiction of like, we know what it we might not have the answer to what is required, but we know that, like, this is not it, and we have to work. But like, the least we could do is be honest about what we're doing.

20:24

Yesssssss....oh my, thank you. That's what's required.

Dartricia Rollins 20:27

Like, just say, like, yeah, I gotta pay these bills, and I'm trying to employ these people, and I know that we ain't saving nobody in Palestine, but like, I gotta do this over here, and I'm gonna do this over there.

Eva Dickerson 20:38

Thank you. It is so much more honorable to be like, I don't know what I'm doing and tell the truth about it, than to posture word to Cabral, stop lying. Stop fucking lying.

Dartricia Rollins 20:54

Yeah, yeah. Well, this is great. And I want before, before we stop recording, is there anything else that you want to share?

Eva Dickerson 21:08

Oh, my God, I didn't talk about my like, RJ story, okay, it's so funny. Okay, okay, okay. Oh, my God, just gonna go the internet. But I think it's so funny. I love my RJ story, um, I got a lil boo thing. He's not Black. *laughter*

Dartricia Rollins 21:25

We'll talk about that later.

Eva Dickerson 21:26

It's critical to the story. He's not black. And I, I fell pregnant, and I was like, you know, like, I I'm anti kid, not because kids aren't great, but I'm like, I don't make enough money. I want it to be fun. I don't know what type of world I'm bringing you into. It's not consensual for you. Like, in the perfect conditions, I think I would make a really fun parent. But in these conditions, I'm like, it's looking like Beloved in this bitch. *laughter* In these conditions, um, but the thing that really pushed me over the edge was I don't want no mixed child. So I was like, Damn, you gotta go a little (unintelligible). We can't do it. I don't want to have no mixed child. And it's just like, it was really political to me about like, like, Would I be able to raise a mixed person who was socially adjusted? No. They would be annoying. They'd be on Twitter, like, my mom's Black, "your what," "you said, what," you know, like, I'll be up under them tweets like, delete it. *laughter* And I, because of Yemi and all my other great friends who are part of reproductive liberation work and are struggling every day on the behalf of all of us, I knew about the six week abortion ban. I knew about, like, it starts on the first day of your last menstrual period, and not from the day that you realize you miss your period. I knew about Feminist Women Health Center, like it was so smooth and the whole process, people kept being like, are you okay? Like, fetus, delete us. I'm great.

Dartricia Rollins 22:58

I love that.

Eva Dickerson 22:58

I'm so good reproductive justice organizers, like, got my back. I didn't pay for my procedure. I didn't sweat about my procedure. I, like, texted a few people like, hey, I need to handle this. And I was like, link, link, link, click, click, click. And I was like, ready to go. I knew. I knew, even down to the detail, that I didn't want a medication abortion because I didn't want to be down bad three days at my house. I was like, No, I just suck that shit out. And it was just, it really brought home to me, like people have been working so hard so I could have this exact experience. And I did, and I was so honored and grateful. So, that's my RJ story.

Ashby Combahee 23:41

No, but we beat those stories.

Eva Dickerson 23:43

Yeah, I need to shout my abortion. I'm not having no mixed childdddddd.

Ashby Combahee 23:48

I mean, listen, I commiserate.

Eva Dickerson 23:57

How you see that word? Miscegenation?

23:59

No, shut up! *laughter*

Ashby Combahee 24:03

And on that note.